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SCOPING STATEMENT North Zone 2003 Trail Relocation/Reconstruction

USDA FOREST SERVICE Shoshone National Forest North Zone/Wapiti Ranger District Park County, Wyoming

Introduction

The Shoshone National Forest is proposing trail reconstruction/relocation projects and trail planning as part of the North Zone's 2003 work plan. The projects that are proposed include:

1. Three sections on the South Fork Trail are identified for trail work, two to be completed in 2003. For the third section, planning and design would be completed in 2003 for reconstruction/relocation of the "cat-walk" portion of the South Fork Shoshone River Trail, with actual trail work in 2004.
2. Red Creek Bridge removal on the Pahaska/Sunlight Trail #751 in 2003
3. Reconstruct the Firefighter Memorial sections of the Blackwater/Clayton Trail #758 in 2003
4. Widen and stabilize hazardous sections of the Ishawooa Mesa Trail #770 in 2003

Because of safety concerns, the trail work is a high priority for 2003. Because of implementing these projects, major safety concerns and resource impacts caused by ongoing erosion and trail widening should be reduced. In addition, these actions will comply with trail standards and safety guidelines, but still meet wilderness experience criteria for a trail that provides a high degree of challenge, self-reliance, and risk. It is not intended or anticipated that visitor use numbers, visitor encounters, or campsite impacts would increase along the trail corridor from these projects. The proposed action falls under Category 1, in Section 32 of the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 – Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook – Construction and Reconstruction of Trails.

Generally, the trail crew would consist of a livestock packer and three to six trail crew members to work on the projects. All work in wilderness requiring the use of a rock drill would first be authorized through a minimum tool analysis; all project work described would be subject to an archaeological clearance.

Proposed Action

South Fork Trail Reconstruction. The backcountry crews would camp in proximity to the work site while working on the trails. The South Fork Trail is a mainline trail in the Washakie Wilderness and is used by hikers, horses, and pack stock as a primary access to the wilderness. The South Fork Trail work involves three separate sections:

- This section of the South Fork trail #608.2 is located in a slide area and is a major safety concern. It is located in the Washakie Wilderness in T48N, R106W Section 31. An obvious safety hazard exists. This section needs about 400 feet of trail work. Use of rock drills and retainer logs would be required. The project would require about 10 to 20 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer.



- This section of the South Fork trail #608.2 is a major safety concern. It is located in the Washakie Wilderness in T47N, R107W Section 34 and is known as the “stair steps.” An obvious safety hazard exists. This section needs about 800’ of relocation/new construction. Use of rock drills and retainer logs would be required. The project would require about 20 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer.
- This section of the South Fork trail #809.2 is a major safety concern. It is located in the Washakie Wilderness in T47N, R107W Section 23 and is known as the “cat-walk.” An obvious safety hazard exists. For this section, planning and design would be accomplished in 2003 to evaluate the feasibility of relocation or reconstruction. Differences between relocation versus reconstruction are highlighted as follows:
 - **Relocation.** The existing trail tread would be reconstructed for approximately 660 feet. Use of rock drills and retainer logs would be required. The project would require about 30 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer to complete the reconstruction.
 - **Reconstruction.** A 1.5 to two mile long reroute below the existing area would be constructed. The first 1.5 miles of the reroute would be located on an old, existing system trail (the Silver Creek Trail). The project would require about 120 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer to complete the reconstruction.

Depending on funding, this section could be contracted out.

Red Creek Bridge Removal. This project is in the North Absaroka Wilderness on the mainline Pahaska/Sunlight Trail #751. The Red Creek Bridge (T53N, R109W, Section 14) would be removed and an alternate stream ford below the bridge area used for crossings. The Red Creek Bridge was damaged during the Yellowstone fires of 1988 and has become a safety concern. Within the wilderness, this permanent structure is not needed. A trail reroute of approximately 1, 320 feet would be completed. The project would require about 20 days, three to six crew members and a livestock packer.

Blackwater/Clayton Mountain Trail. This project is not in wilderness. It is on the mainline Blackwater/Clayton Mountain Trail #758 that accesses the Blackwater Firefighter Memorial and a Forest radio repeater. The project would involve two sections of trail. In area 1 (T51N, R107W Section 4), the trail tread is completely eroded and does not allow access to the remainder of the trail, the Firefighter Memorial, or the repeater. An obvious safety problem exists; in 2002, a packhorse was killed on this trail. This section needs 660 feet of trail reconstruction and stabilization of the trail tread. Use of rock drills and retainer logs would be used. The project would require about 10 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer to complete. In area 2 (T51N, R107W Section 3), the same total loss of the trail exists. It needs about 660 feet of the trail tread reconstructed and stabilized and would require the same number of crew members and days.

Ishawooa Mesa Trail. This project is in the Washakie Wilderness, on the Ishawooa Mesa Trail #770 (T49N, R106W, Section 12). The project would involve widening, stabilization, and installation of log retainers. Some rock removal is needed; rock drill authorization would be required. An obvious safety problem exists and numerous complaints have been received from the public. This section needs 660 feet of trail work, widening, and stabilization. The project would require about 20 days, three to six crew members, and a livestock packer to complete.

Project Design/Mitigation. To minimize any environmental effects, these project design criteria and implementation methods would be an integral part of the proposed action:

- A minimum tool analysis would be completed to guide implementation (methods and techniques) of the project in the wilderness area.
- Construct the trail/tread to the standard necessary to accommodate the specified class of user.

- A cultural resource survey would be completed. Project design would include protecting the historic nature of the area.
- Leave No Trace camping techniques would be used by the trail reconstruction crew to minimize the impacts to existing campsites or new use areas.
- The use of stock by crews on the trail projects would be limited as much as possible to minimize the formation of new impacted sites.
- Weed-free certified feed would be used for horse/pack stock.
- Bear food storage orders and other techniques for camping in bear country would be followed. All employees, contractors, and subcontractors involved in the project would comply with the following conditions in the conduct of all activities associated with the project in order to prevent human/bear conflicts and to minimize injuries if involved in an encounter with a bear.
 - ✓ All persons involved will complete human safety awareness training relative to human/bear conflict prevention/avoidance procedures, encounter procedures, and the use of bear spray.
 - ✓ Bear-resistant storage facilities will be available, and all persons will adhere to the proper use and storage of attractants.
 - ✓ All persons will adhere to the identified garbage and refuse handling and disposal procedures.

Purpose and Need

The Need for Action. The project is tied to goals in the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and general Plan direction, primarily to construct or reconstruct trails only when needed to meet objectives of the wilderness transportation system. The need for the project is to comply with Plan direction for the wilderness transportation system and mainline trails in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 to protect and perpetuate essentially natural biophysical conditions and to provide for wilderness recreation opportunities. Additional direction is found in the Washakie and North Absaroka Wilderness Plans.

The Purpose for Action. The proposed action is to improve the health and safety concerns present on-site, especially concerning the location of the trail in talus slopes, narrow areas with drop-offs, or steep and rocky slopes. The purpose of reconstruction and relocation trail projects is to meet the wilderness transportation system standards and guidelines. Project goals are: 1) reduce hazards and improve safety conditions for wilderness trail users on foot, horse, and/or pack stock, 2) improve resource conditions by reducing sedimentation or relocating sections of trails where poor location, braiding or other impacts are occurring, 3) improve trail design on route location through talus slopes and steep, narrow areas to maintain the effectiveness of the short- and long-term maintenance and improve safety on this trail, 4) improve the visitor's experience on the trail and provide for recreation opportunities.

The trail would be constructed to the standard necessary to accommodate the specified class of user (horse and pack stock). Safety hazards are present due to the deteriorated condition and poorly located trail through the steep areas or talus rock slopes. The purpose is to perform relocation or reconstruction of the existing trail to improve the conditions that pose a safety hazard and risk of injury or death.

Issues. Implementing the proposed action is based on the following preliminary issues and how the actions would address the issue:

- Recreation/wilderness facilities and experiences - How to implement the proposal with the least impact to the wilderness resource and be the least apparent to the user?
- Health and safety - How to provide for the removal of hazards and a safe experience?

- Resource management - How to maintain trails used by horses and pack stock for resource protection (soil, water, wilderness) and provide for the protection and perpetuation of natural biophysical conditions?

Scoping and Public Involvement

The intent of this letter is to solicit written comments from interested parties to help identify issues relative to proposals being described in this scoping statement. We are seeking to involve interested agencies and the public for this specific proposal for trail projects. Scoping is to determine the scope of the issues to be addressed and to identify significant issues related to the proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7). Your input will assist us in identifying any issues with this proposed project.

This is an opportunity for your involvement early in the planning process; your comments and suggestions are needed and encouraged. Project alternatives will be determined and environmental consequences analyzed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process initiated by this scoping letter. We are asking for comments, alternatives to the proposed action, and any information you may want us to consider during project development and the environmental analysis. Scoping may identify other management opportunities or activities, provide additional information that the team will incorporate into the proposed action, and help formulate other alternatives.

Contacts. The public is provided this opportunity to identify and submit issues and concerns they feel the Forest Service should address. If you feel we have overlooked something or have additional information, comments need to be as specific as possible to assist us in the project planning and analysis. Questions should be directed to Thad Harper, Bill Oliver, and Trampus Barhaug, telephone (307) 527-6921.

A 30-day public comment period is being provided; your comments would be most helpful if received in writing no later than February 28, 2003. Written comments can be mailed to: Marty Sharp, NEPA Coordinator, North Zone/Wapiti Ranger District, 203A Yellowstone Ave., Cody, WY 82414, e-mailed to msharp@fs.fed.us, faxed to (307) 527-1202, or phone (307) 527-6921.

Thank You. Your interest in our programs and projects, and your participation in the environmental planning process are appreciated. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Brent L. Larson
BRENT L. LARSON
District Ranger